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The capital of the Interstate Livestock Company has been subscribed by public spirited men who are operating this company on a non-profit basis. Through this agency breeding sheep have been brought in large quantities from the western range, and are being distributed throughout the eastern farming sections.

The effort to restore sheep husbandry to the eastern farms has therefore reached a definite, practical stage of operation. There is evidence that there will be a greater appreciation of the value of this industry by every one. Though there are many obstacles and problems in the way to be solved before sheep husbandry will attain its full development in our farming sections, there is every hope and assurance that it will obtain its rightful recognition and be restored to its proper status in connection with eastern agriculture. It will not be accomplished in a day nor in a year, but the logic of events and its imperative necessity, are bound to bring about its ultimate establishment.

THE WAR AND OUR POTATO INDUSTRY

BY LOU D. SWEET,

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Our entrance into the war against Germany brought us face to face with serious economic problems—greater problems than we were ever confronted with before in the history of this country. One of the greatest of these problems was that of our food supply. Not only did it become necessary for us to produce crops sufficient to take care of our own needs, but coincident with our alliance with the Entente Allies we were called upon to supply in great measure the foods needed by soldiers and civilians of the allied countries.

Our federal Department of Agriculture appealed pointedly to the farmers of this country for an increased production of all food crops. This appeal met with immediate response, often accompanied by great sacrifice by farmers themselves who had to finance their operations with borrowed capital. Particularly in the case of our potato crop has this response been tremendously patriotic; an additional seven hundred and seventeen thousand acres were planted to this crop, which early this season was forecasted by our federal

Bureau of Crop Estimates to yield something like one hundred and seventeen million bushels above the average yields for the period 1911 to 1916.

However, this emergency crop of potatoes did not have the benefit of any too great care in its planting, and this is absolutely no reflection upon the farmers themselves. Owing to the high price of seed potatoes and the inadequate supply, seed was planted which was totally unfit for use as such. One might say that culls and even peelings were planted. On top of this the price of fertilizers was so abnormally high as to make their use well nigh prohibitive. Consequently, the 1917 potato crop has been produced from poor seed, poorly nourished, and therefore does not give any too great promise of exhibiting high keeping qualities. At this writing the harvest season is about on. Meanwhile droughts, late blight and insect damage have greatly reduced the crop in sight below that which was estimated early in the season. And yet with all these setbacks we are certain to have a crop considerably in excess of the average harvest of this country.

The pressing question is: now that we have raised it, what are we going to do with it? This late potato crop, which is harvested over a period of six weeks, must serve as a great factor in our food supply over a period something like nine months. It will not serve as food over that period if the greatest care is not taken in its harvesting, storage and distribution, and this brings up one major problem in the war-made economic situation, to aid in solving which the United States Food Administration is devoting no small measure of its energy.

Let me make it perfectly clear that the Food Administration does not plan to handle this crop in the sense of acting as purchaser or distributor. Only in the case of wheat has the administration taken these extreme measures. With regard to the potato problem, the Food Administration plans to assist all normal machinery having at do with the handling of this crop and toward securing an equitable distribution of it.

An equitable distribution means more than most of us imagine. It means that the farmer who has produced this crop must receive for it a price which will repay him for the heavy expense of its production; otherwise you cannot expect him to plant heavily another year. The consumer must be able to buy potatoes at a price which

does not put them in the class of luxuries. Between those two extremes lies many a pitfall which can wreck the hope of securing these justices for either producer or consumer, or both.

I have tried to make it plain that the Food Administration is attempting to coöperate with normal business agencies for securing the best possible disposition of this potato crop. It has called to Washington a large number of growers and distributors to discuss with these gentlemen the best plans toward that end. And it has endeavored to impress upon these gentlemen that the only way under the sun that these results can be achieved is through a whole-hearted spirit of service on their part. The Food Administration is using no club, it merely extends to every factor its right hand of coöperation.

It has been definitely decided that potato distributors will be licensed. The trade, generally, seems to heartily approve of this plan. This license acts as a safeguard for the efficient coöperating distributor's efforts against unscrupulous practices which occasionally break out and now would nullify the best endeavors.

The Food Administration does not discountenance the storing of potatoes for the purpose of assuring the market an even, steady flow of that food product. Only in the case of storage for the purpose of bringing about an abnormal shortage in the market to the end of influencing prices, will the Food Administration seek recourse to laws which will enable it to correct such abuses. The policy of the Food Administration is strictly a constructive one. Its legal powers have been provided simply to protect the coöperation entered into by it and the whole trade.

While there is no cure-all for the problems arising in connection with the disposition of this potato crop, yet there are a number of steps which may be taken and which have been taken, to make the solution of these problems just a bit easier. For example, it was my privilege, in a measure, to influence the recent ruling of the Federal Reserve Board under which potatoes properly sorted and graded and properly stored, will furnish adequate security for warehouse receipts negotiable at member banks at a rate not to exceed 6 per cent, including all commissions.

To make such a ruling work out successfully rather than develop into a flat fiasco, we must have some standard rules for grading to tie to. In coöperation with the federal Department of Agriculture,

the Food Administration has worked out these official grades which have been approved, and which will serve as a basis for the efficient operation of the Federal Réserve ruling.

Many of us are familiar with the story of the reclamation projects; many of us know of the near-tragedy which has surrounded the settlement of many of these areas. Pioneering in America was not ended in '49. It goes on today on these projects, and I know of no more beautiful example of American aggressive fortitude than exemplified in the daily life of many of our reclamation settlers. So many of these settlers are heavily in debt that I am taking this opportunity to record what to my mind is typical of America's response to the President's appeal for increased production of food crops. As I say, many were heavily in debt, but they have borrowed money to increase their production of potatoes—borrowed money for seed, implements and labor. Their crops have been good, for many of the projects consist of the best potato soil in this country.

When harvest was about to come, they faced inadequate storage facilities for this crop. For any government agency to advise these people that the thing to do was to erect sufficient storage capacity, would have been about as helpful to them as a treatise on dietetics would be to a starving man. They would have built additional storage facilities if they had had the funds to do it. Secretary Lane, of the Interior Department, with the Reclamation Service officials, stepped into this breach and loaned government money to the project settlers to take care of this problem. The large shippers of potatoes off these projects throughout the country assure us that there will be little or no loss on this crop due to lack of storage facilities. This, of course, is good to know. It takes a load off our minds.

Early this season, and even now for that matter, there has been a more or less general thought that in view of our increased production of potatoes it would be necessary and highly economical to put great quantities of these through processes of dehydration. The dehydrated potato is merely one which has been sliced or shredded, dried of practically all its moisture, and so put in a form to keep well nigh indefinitely. Dehydrated products lose nothing of their original nutritive value, but they do lose bulk and therefore economize in the matter of freight charges and storage space.

During the Boer War the British government had prepared for

its troops tremendous quantities of dehydrated vegetables. These were usually made up in mixtures of potatoes, onions, carrots, and the like; one hundred pounds of which dried product are said to have made soup rations for sixty-four hundred troops. During the present war certain dehydrating firms in this country and Canada have received large contracts from the British government for this same product.

In the Food Administration we have looked carefully into the possibilities of taking care of a goodly portion of our surplus potato crop by means of dehydration, but from our findings we are not inclined to recommend the investment of additional capital in such enterprises. As a matter of fact one firm alone in this country is prepared on short notice to furnish up to several million pounds of dehydrated potatoes monthly, a quantity sufficient to care for any needs of our army or navy. Nor is there at present any great general public demand for this product. It has not been exploited, and even though it were it is doubtful if housewives would prefer a dry product to the fresh one, and with few exceptions the fresh product is available throughout the year.

There are some limited outlets for the surplus, particularly culls, in the manufacture of potato starch and potato starch flour, and potato flakes for livestock feed, but these outlets are limited. So in the last analysis we come back to the conclusion that the greater proportion of this crop must be consumed in the fresh state as food for human beings. These, briefly, are some of the problems which the administration has attacked.

Because my experience in the potato industry has been primarily that of a grower, instinctively I look at the present situation from the grower's viewpoint, and I can see a number of tremendous lessons which this war is teaching potato growers of this country. It has shown us that we are not nearly as efficient potato growers as we should be, even in times of peace. Our yields have been discouragingly small when compared with those of other countries. This has not been because we did not have the soil or the practical knowledge necessary to produce larger crops. It was simply because we have allowed ourselves to drift along in a rut. Producing large crops per acre of prime potatoes is no mysterious process to be worked out by black magic. It merely consists in first building up the potato soil, and then giving that soil the right seed and the right

treatment after the seed has germinated. A potato soil must have plenty of humus and all other forms of plant food. The seed itself must not be left-over degenerate, but a seed true to type and coming from a strain that is vigorous and highly productive. That sounds too simple to warrant serious thought. Just these simple things we have overlooked, and we will have to go back to them, if during the war and after the war we expect to develop our potato industry to a plane of greatest efficiency.

In the future we must grade. Those of us in the business know that farmers and dealers are both parties to the wrong when it comes to a total absence of grading in many cases, or careless grading in others. If one competing buyer at a station will not insist upon the farmers bringing in graded potatoes, naturally his competitors will have to buy on the same basis, and naturally you cannot expect the farmer to take it upon himself to try to revolutionize the other end of the business. He is going to sell what the other man will buy. Human nature today in the potato game is human nature before Christ, in Babylon.

And the more we grade, the more culls we will have, and the more culls we have the more we will have to find a place for them other than the dump pile. Our Department of Agriculture has found that the cull potatoes when properly put up make a silage the feeding value of which is equal to that of corn silage. Poultry investigators have found a place for the cull potato in the feed ration of laying hens. I might enumerate a great many other uses for cull potatoes but that is beside the point. The point is that we must encourage stricter grading with its consequent increase in the number of culls by exploiting legitimate and profitable uses for this cull stock. We are investigating these uses now and unquestionably many of them will be of great value during this war emergency.

But if we let it stop when the war stops, if we let any of these agricultural economic reforms lapse when peace is declared, then we will have killed the greatest chance for agricultural and economic advancement that has ever been open to us since Christopher Columbus planted his foot on American soil.

It is a good thing to be able to see a silver lining in any cloud. I can see one to this war cloud, and it is made up of the reforms and improvements in our economic and social structures that we have had to design so as to meet the great crisis, and my one hope is that these improvements will stay with us.